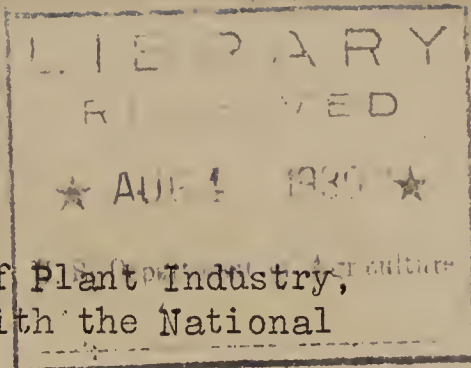


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THE GARDEN CALENDAR.



A radio talk by W. R. Beattie, horticulturist, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered through WRC and 34 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, Tuesday, July 22, 1930.

My ramblings during the past week were through a section of northern Maryland where there are many small farms on most of which there are old-time home orchards. A fair percentage of the apple trees in these orchards are of summer varieties which are ripening at this time of the year. An examination of some of this fruit displayed for sale on roadside stands showed much of it to have been picked before fully matured, while some of it was over-ripe. The prevailing tendency, however, was to gather the fruit before it reached proper tree-maturity.

It is not difficult to tell when fruit is in prime condition for gathering. There are several indications by which we may be guided, but that of color is the most important. Practically every variety of apple has its characteristic color when ripe. Most varieties have a leafy green color prior to the time that they begin to mature. Take the Yellow Transparent, for instance, which is being marketed in many sections at this time. The apples have a decidedly green tinge until they begin to ripen, then they change to a pale yellow, the yellow becoming more pronounced as ripening proceeds. With this variety the proper time to pick for market is just when the change from the green to the pale yellow begins. For home use the fruit may perhaps remain on the tree a day or two longer. The additional day or two on the trees not only increases the size of the fruit, but if not left too long, improves the flavor.

Another test is the way that fruit adheres to the trees. If it separates readily from the fruit-spurs, it is ready to pick, but if the apples are so firmly attached that they remove the tips of the fruit-spurs with them, it is unwise to gather them, both on account of immaturity and the damage through removal of the fruit spurs. Two or three pickings are advisable in order to allow all the fruit to reach the proper stage of ripeness.

Pears should not be allowed to remain on the trees until ripe, and a favorite test to determine when they are ready to gather is to turn the fruit upward. If the stem parts from the fruit spur, the fruit is ready to pick, while if the stem still adheres to the spurs, the fruit should be left to mature further.

In the case of peaches, maturity can be determined almost entirely by color, but under no circumstances should the fruit be squeezed or pinched to determine its ripeness. Of course, the color varies with variety, but the red changes to a deeper red on the blushed portion, and the yellow becomes more pronounced on the unblushed portion. Peaches for home use will have better flavor if fully tree-ripened while those that are to be sold must be gathered while firm enough to stand handling. While the color varies with different varieties of peaches, the change of color in ripening is so pronounced that no one should have difficulty in recognizing the maturity of the fruit by the color alone.

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The use to be made of any fruit, will, to a considerable degree, determine the stage of maturity at which it should be picked, but fruit for home use, which does not have to be hauled or shipped to market, should be allowed to become reasonably mature before it is taken from the trees.

So much for the picking of the fruit, now as to its care afterward. Fruit should be picked early in the day before it has had a chance to become heated by the sun. After picking it should be placed in the shade where it will have a free circulation of air to cool it.

Fruit that is to be placed in cold storage or shipped under refrigeration should, of course, be placed in the refrigeration temperature as soon as possible after gathering. In many towns there are local cold storage and ice plants where you can store a few bushels of apples temporarily until you want them for home use or for selling. If you have later varieties coming on which will furnish a supply during late summer and fall, it may not pay to do this. I have on several occasions placed a few bushels of apples in cold storage for short periods.

Whenever apples are in season, we always have a pan of them in the refrigerator where the children can get them whenever they want an apple to eat. These apples that are kept for immediate eating are carefully selected as to ripeness, and we prefer that the children get their eating apples in this way rather than to go to the trees for them.

I dare say that most of you, through long years of experience and practice, have a very good idea of the stage of ripeness at which the various fruits should be gathered for home use, but I wonder how many of you actually make a practice of selecting the best fruit, gathering it at the right stage of maturity, and placing it where it will keep for later use.

The Department specialists have done a great amount of work in determining the proper stage of maturity for picking apples and other fruits that are to go into commercial storage, but we have done very little along the line of teaching the people how to gather fruit for home use. I believe that if many of you will give this matter thought you will get greater satisfaction out of your home supply of fruit, especially the early or summer fruit.

Later in the season, we will have something for you about the proper gathering of fruit which is to be stored for winter use, also the best ways of storing fruits at home.